

# *The Alexander Thomson Society Newsletter*

Nº32, October 2002

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A monument to Peter  
Nicholson

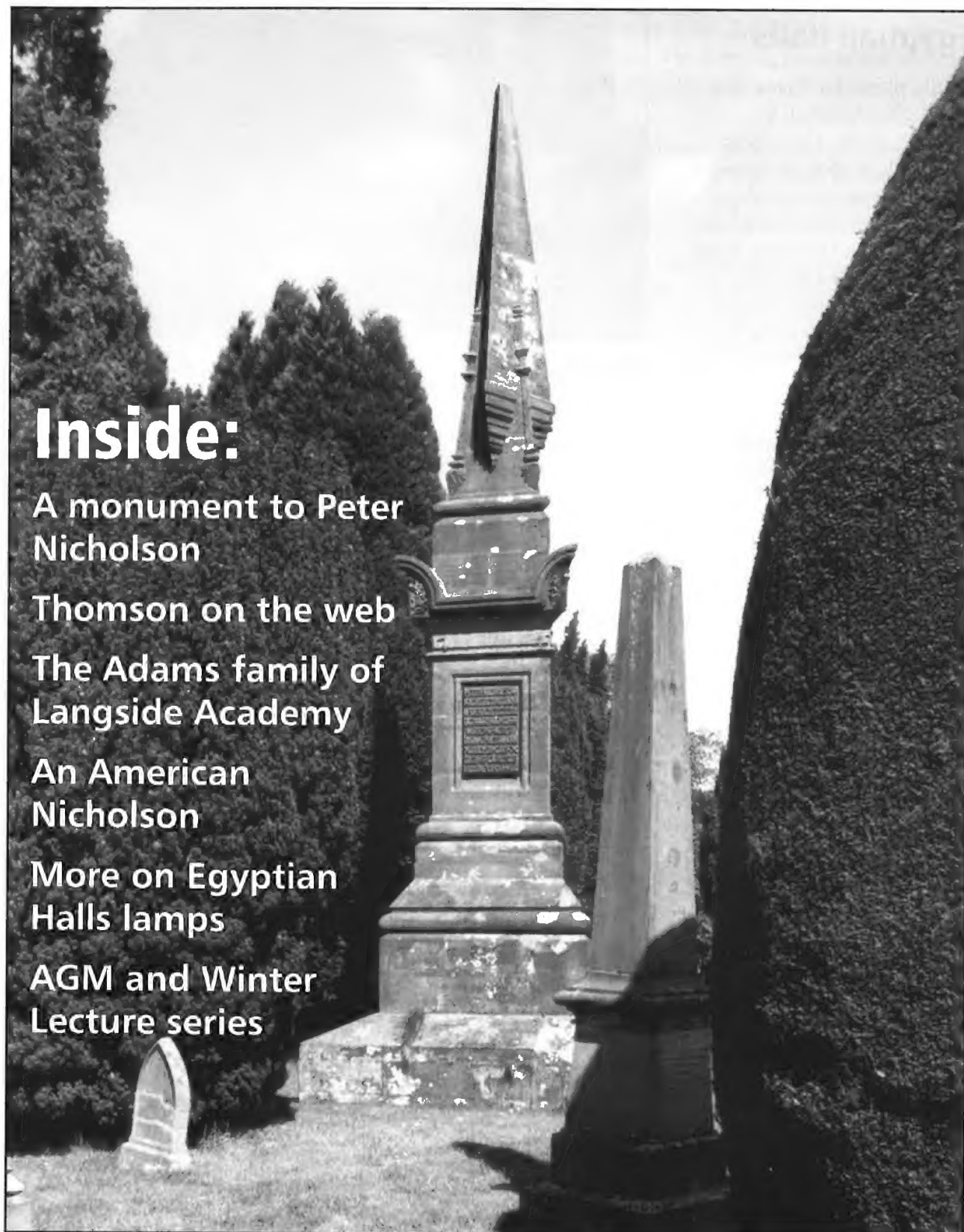
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# CASES

## Egyptian Halls

We are pleased to know that Mr Bradley Mitchell has acquired the northernmost ground-floor shop in Egyptian Halls and that he intends to restore the original design for the shopfront. Our own Roger Guthrie has been advising his architects over this, ensuring that the details for both the restored shopfront and the new internal staircase are accurately based on Thomson's work. The original appearance of the shops is, of course, recorded in the early Thomas Annan photograph, so often reproduced.

When Thomson's design, with its large sheets of plate glass running in front of the internal iron columns, is recreated, we hope that it might be adopted for the other three shops. In this context, it is worth noting that over the years the former Planning Department of Glasgow City Council succeeded in having the incised decorative stone surrounds to the shops exposed from under inappropriate fascias and alterations by insisting on this whenever a planning application for the shops was submitted.

It is worth observing that the shop now owned by Mr Mitchell retains interesting original plasterwork and capitals to the internal iron columns.



## Buck's Head Building

Scaffolding now covers this building (*above*), to which a large unsightly advertising sign has been fixed (and to which we object). Given the importance of this surviving commercial building by Thomson, in terms both of its design and the use of iron, both externally and internally, we hope that the refurbishment currently being carried out will respect the interesting details of this listed building – and be closely monitored by the Planning and Regeneration Department of Glasgow City Council.

At least we can agree with the sentiments of the architects about Thomson's standing as shown below...

## Great Western Terrace

Given the fame of Great Western Terrace and the admiration Thomson's sublime design has long elicited, it seems extraordinary that we should have to worry about its future, but we are deeply concerned about the deteriorating physical condition of No.8 – the house later altered by Sir Robert Lorimer for Sir William Burrell and which served for some years as an old people's home.



## Thomson Society on the web at [www.greekthomson.com](http://www.greekthomson.com)

This house is owned by Glasgow City Council, which has attempted – so far without success – to come up with an appropriate scheme for converting it into an acceptable number of dwelling units (the hugely successful restoration of No.4 Great Western Terrace, we note, involved only making a separate flat in the basement). Meanwhile, although the ground floor windows and door are boarded up, the property is visibly deteriorating. The roof now leaks; at least one internal ceiling has collapsed and the water penetration may well be affected the neighbouring houses and thus the condition of the whole listed terrace.

We consider that Glasgow City Council needs to act immediately to rectify this absurd and disgraceful state of affairs, and we have called on Historic Scotland to take appropriate enforcement action.

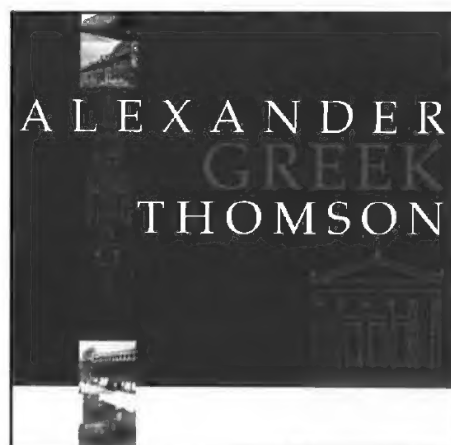
WWW.GREEKTHOMSON.COM is the new online address for The Alexander Thomson Society. The website, launched at the end of September, contains a host of material about Thomson, his life and his buildings.

Information on the site has been drawn from many sources, not least Gavin Stamp's comprehensive list of Thomson buildings and works in the book to accompany the Glasgow 1999 exhibition *Alexander Thomson: the Unknown Genius*.

As a site it's about 90% complete: there's information from previous newsletters to incorporate, and additional merchandising to explore (and the ability to purchase goods and join online to add). But it's a start.

### Create your own Thomson home

What would you do if you had to design or recreate a 'Greek' Thomson building? That's the problem this educational CD-ROM from SCRAN sets out to explore. Browsing through the different sections, you can collect different building parts that would have been typical in a Thomson design, then use them to create your own Thomson facade.



Running on Apple Macintosh and Windows, the CD is available from [www.scran.ac.uk](http://www.scran.ac.uk), price £20 plus postage.

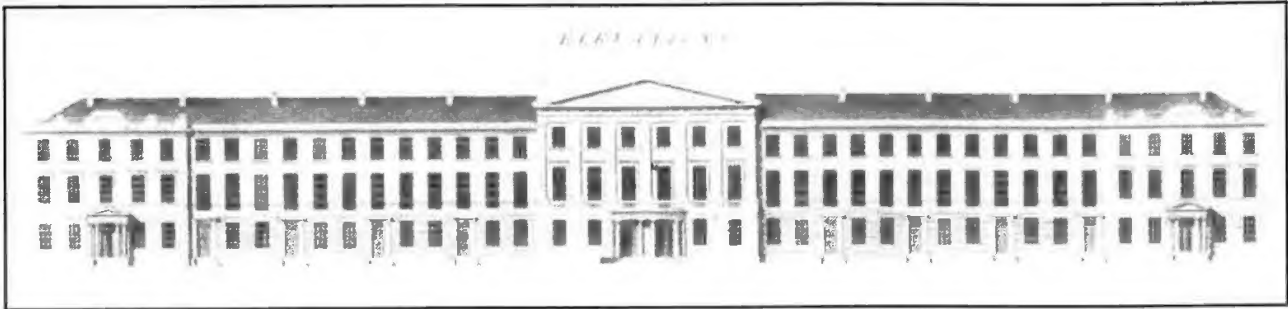
## Annual General Meeting

THIS YEAR'S Annual General Meeting takes place on Wednesday, 27th November from 5.45pm in the 5th Floor Conference Room of the Mitchell Library, North Street, Glasgow. Refreshments will be served, and the meeting will end by 7.45pm.

Courtesy of the City Archivist, those attending will be able to see a range of material from Glasgow City Archives: this will take place *before* the business of the meeting, which will commence at 7.00pm.

The Mitchell Library is close to Charing Cross railway station and bus connections. The Conference Room is fully accessible: please enter via the Kent Road entrance.

# Winter Lectures... and a visit



**W**E CONTINUE our annual round of Winter Lectures this year with a series of four lectures at the Mackintosh School of Architecture and finish it off with a site visit.

Lectures take place on **WEDNESDAYS** at 7.00 p.m. in the First Floor Lecture Theatre in the Mackintosh School of Architecture (the Bourdon Building), at Glasgow School of Art. The nearest Underground station is Cowcaddens, the nearest rail

station Glasgow Queen Street, and buses run along the nearby Sauchiehall and West Graham Streets. Car parking is problematic.

On 5th February, Gavin Stamp explores **Peter Nicholson** and his descendants.

On 12th February, Mark Baines talks on **Thomson and the Glasgow Cross project**.

On 19th February, Dominic d'Angelo talks on **Thomson and the Trading Magnates**, exploring family connections

*Above: Laurieston House, venue for our site visit on 5th March.*

with what was to become Finlay Plc.

On 26th February, Ian Gow talks on **Holmwood and the 19th century interior**.

Finally, on 5th March, we pay an evening visit with Roger Guthrie to **Laurieston House**, 52 Carlton Place, designed by Peter Nicholson. We meet outside the House (Underground, St Enoch; Train, Glasgow Central).

## MEMBER OFFERS

**MURRAY GRIGOR'S VIDEO 'Nineveh on the Clyde: The Architecture of Alexander 'Greek' Thomson'** is available to Society members at a special price of £12, inclusive of P&P.

The 55-minute video includes additional footage not seen in its original television showing. The video is available in VHS (also NTSC format for US viewers).

**'THE LIGHT OF TRUTH AND BEAUTY':** Alexander Thomson's public lectures brought together in a single volume. They reveal him as a powerful and eloquent speaker, and confirm that not only was he one of the most original architects of his time, but also that his was one of the greatest minds in Scottish architecture.

Published at £9.95 paperback and £16.95 hardback, as a member of The Alexander Thomson Society, you can save almost 50% on the retail cost of the book.

Paperback: ~~£9.95~~ £6.00

Hardback: ~~£16.95~~ £11.00

The members' price includes P&P.

Simply send your name and address with a cheque payable to 'The Alexander Thomson Society', and post it to 'Video Offer' or 'Light of Truth Offer', The Alexander Thomson Society, 1 Moray Place, Strathbungo, Glasgow G41 2AQ.



# Michael Angelo Nicholson in Co. Derry

**D**ID MICHAEL Angelo Nicholson, Alexander Thomson's father-in-law, ever actually build anything? He certainly drew enough, including engravings for his father's many books, and Professor James Stevens Curl's *Georgian Architecture* includes his designs for different grades of houses.

In Co. Derry, there's a building that suggests that he did. Not that Michael Angelo is likely to have headed over to what is now Northern Ireland to supervise its construction, but at least we have something that bears his own name, not conjoined with that of his father, Peter Nicholson.

The building in question is a Market house, or court house, built in what was then the town of Muff (now Eglinton), Co. Derry, and now occupied by the Northern Bank.

Muff (from the Irish, meaning a plain or level district) was founded in 1619 by the Grocers' Company of London, and leased out for farming. A castle (really a castellated house and barn) was built: it was besieged in 1641 during the Civil War, ultimately falling into the hands of the Parliamentarians, by whom it was dismantled. The ruins were standing and occupied until 1823, when a Rectory was built on the site..

It was in 1823 that the Grocers' Company resumed active management of the estate, as part of which they



rebuilt the village between 1823 and 1825. Among the buildings erected were the rectory, a manor house for the Grocers' agent, cottages and the Market house. These buildings all survive.

Nicholson's Market house included a dispensary: today, wall plaques outside the building show the coats of arms of the Grocers' Company and of David Babington, a local farmer.

The assumption is that Michael Angelo Nicholson was commissioned by the Grocers' Company simply to provide a design, without having any involvement in its actual construction. Whether the Grocers' Company approached him, or he they, is unknown as yet, nor whether he did any other work for the Company.

In 1874, the Grocers sold the village to Mr James Davidson of Brechin, whose descendants still reside in the manor house.

Although Michael Angelo's father, Peter Nicholson, worked for the Earl of Eglinton (working on the layout of Ardrossan, for example), the change of name from Muff to Eglinton post-dates Michael Angelo's involvement with the location. As there were several other places called Muff, especially one in Donegal nearby, the residents decided on a change of name, and in August 1858 took the name of Eglinton to honour the then-Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, the 13th Earl of Eglinton, who was visiting a local agricultural school at the time.

By JUDY WARDLAW

# The Adam family of Langside Academy

**A**S TIME passes, we learn more about Thomson, his family and his work. Little research, however, has so far been published on Thomson's clients, the people who actually purchased his designs and saw them through to reality.

In Australia, Judy Wardlaw has been researching her family history, and links to the Adam family who opened Langside Academy in the 19th century, and taught Thomson's children. Here are her findings.



**A**BOUT 1838, George Diack Adam (1813-1862) left his birthplace, Aberdeen by stagecoach for Perth, aged about 25, to follow his profession of schoolteacher in a school connected with the church of which his friend and fellow townsman, Rev Andrew Gray, was the minister. Under his management, and the new methods it introduced, the school became somewhat famous. Alongside professional duties in Perth, he threw himself into religious activities: George was a serious-minded young man to whom religion had become the supreme concern and whose intimate friends were like-minded. The Evangelical Revivalist Movement, which spread throughout Scotland in the early period of last century, brought together George and his future wife Jean (Jane) Constable (1824-1913). The age difference between the



*Glasgow Normal Seminary, designed by David Hamilton, where George Adam worked*

two was ten years, Jane being barely eighteen at her marriage in 1841. Not long after their marriage, their first child, Isabella, was born in Perth.

In 1843, George was evicted from his post of schoolmaster in the school maintained by West Parish Church because of his adherence to the Free Church at the Disruption. His friend Andrew Gray was an important figure in the Free Church movement. The Established Church claimed all property and left all teachers who 'came out' to fend for themselves.

George obtained an appointment as Master of the Corporation Academy at Berwick-on-Tweed. While there, from about 1843-47, Alick and Will were born. Because of the conservative outlook of the Directors of this

school, George was glad to accept, about 1847, a position at the newly established Glasgow Free Church Normal Seminary, formed by the educational reformer, David Stow, Dr Chalmers, and later Dr Buchanan. This was where George's main life work was done, putting into practice the ideas and training methods of David Stow, who became an intimate friend.

The religious and moral influence of George Adam upon his scholars was marked. George and Jane, finding city life was not the best suited either to themselves or their growing family, rented a cottage in what was then an entirely country district about three miles from Glasgow in the direction of Cathcart;

*Continued on Page 11*

# Peter Nicholson's amazing monument

**B**Y MARRYING Jane Nicholson, Alexander Thomson, as we know, annexed a distinguished architectural lineage as his wife's grandfather was the remarkable architectural publisher, writer, architect and mathematician, Peter Nicholson. Born near Edinburgh in 1765, Nicholson died in 1844 at Carlisle, the city in which he had lived and worked earlier in his varied career.

He was buried in Christ Church graveyard in Botcher-gate in Carlisle, where, according to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, "a plain headstone marks the spot" but any pilgrim seeking his grave today will be disappointed as the church has been demolished and the churchyard cleared of almost all its gravestones to create a miserable public park.

Nicholson is, however, commemorated in Carlisle, and worthily. A visitor to the Carlisle Cemetery in Richardson Street off Dalston Road, to the south-west of the city, will encounter an extraordinary tall triangular obelisk-monument flanked by yew trees just north of the central axial path which connects the two red brick Gothic chapels (designed by the Hay brothers of Liverpool). On one face it bears the inscription:

PETER NICHOLSON  
ARCHITECT·AUTHOR·  
OF·THE·ARCHITECTURAL·  
DICTIONARY·AND·OTHER·  
WORKS·OF·MERIT·  
BORN·AT·PRESTON·KIRK·  
\*JULY·20·1765\*  
DIED·AT·CARLISLE·  
\*JUNE·18·1844\*

The new 43-acre Carlisle Cemetery on Spital Moor had opened in 1855 to relieve the pressure on the notoriously insanitary city centre, where the six churchyards were full. 1855 was also the year the original design for the monument was published and subscriptions solicited – one subscriber presumably being Alexander Thomson. The project was discussed in the *Carlisle Patriot* for 27th January, 24th February and 7th April, 1855 and an appeal was made to the readers of the short-lived Edinburgh architectural periodical, *The Building Chronicle*, in the issue for 2nd April, 1855, by the designer of the monument, the draughtsman and architect Robert William Billings (1813-74). In his letter, Billings wished

"to urge on the practical men of Scotland to take their part in perpetuating one of their own countrymen" but revealed that almost all the money needed had already been subscribed by Englishmen, one of whom had offered the whole amount required: £40; nevertheless, the committee in Carlisle wanted to commemorate "Nicholson's public utility" and "would rather



see their object accomplished in the name of the workmen's pence."

Billings's letter was accompanied by a double-page etched plate of his design and two horizontal cross-sections illustrating the unusual

triangular geometry. He claimed that "my endeavour has been to mark Peter Nicholson as a Scot by making the detail of his monument of Scottish Architecture..." As inaugurated in 1856, however, the monument differs from the published design. The second and third pedestal panels were left blank, for neither the carving of "his working implements" – drawing instruments – nor the planned inscription recording that "The mechanics of Britain, in gratitude to one of their preceptors, and in admiration of his talent, have erected this monument" were executed (perhaps the workmen of England as well as Scotland failed to contribute their pennies). More important, as built, the base is much taller while the lower obelisk springs from a higher level, thus making the whole monument higher than the 40 feet intended in 1855.

The Peter Nicholson monument really has to be seen to be believed, as it is not only eclectic in style – an imaginative fusion of Classic and Gothic – but an intriguing essay in three-dimensional geometry. The plan is triangular, with a three-sided pedestal rising above bold base mouldings. This pedestal stage with panels is finished off by quadrant *acroteria* facing outwards, but decorated with carved thistles rather than Greek ornament. It is what happens above that is most



astonishing, however, for the "spire" consists of superimposed obelisks. A conventional but three-sided obelisk rises above the pedestal, but another obelisk, of the same size and height has been, as it were, rammed down on top of it having been twisted through an angle of 60° to produce a Star of David section. The corners of the lower obelisk are connected to the upper one by vaguely Gothic mouldings (in fact, stylised upturned torches) which disappear into the flat sides, while the overhang of the base of the upper obelisk is

supported on a succession of continuous corbelled-out mouldings – Billings had written of "the projection of the corbelled spire" and how "the effect of this arrangement will be – as my knowledge of Scots corbelling tells me – picturesque..."

The whole thing has the sculptural vigour of High Victorian Gothic – of that experimental manner, desperate to be original, which Goodhart-Rendel characterised as the work of 'Rogue architects' (F.T. Pilkington being the conspicuous Scottish example).





But what is particularly remarkable is that while the monument looks (and is) symmetrical when seen on one of the six 60° axes generated by the plan of the fused obelisks, from any other angle the monument appears to be asymmetrical, with the upper obelisk apparently lurching to one side – the result of the visual centre of gravity of a triangular obelisk not coinciding with its geometrical centre. This optical illusion clearly delighted the designer of the monument and is most appropriate in commemorating

a remarkable architect who was not only interested in perspective but was also a mathematician, interested in three-dimensional geometry, who, as the DNB put it, “formulated rules for finding sections of prisms, cylinders, or cylindroids, which enabled workmen to execute handrails with greater facility...” Nicholson also had been the first to observe that Greek mouldings were conic in section and that the volute of an Ionic capital was set out on a logarithmic spiral.

R.W. Billings, the designer of the monument to Peter Nicholson, was English but he worked in Scotland, where he is best known as the author and illustrator of the four-volume survey of *The Baronial and Ecclesiastical Antiquities of Scotland* published in 1845-52 – described by the *Building Chronicle* as “the noblest contribution to the architectural literature of Scotland – we may almost say of Britain; for it is in a sense the most national work which has ever appeared...” – whose plates had a huge impact in encouraging the revival of Scottish Baronial. Although born in London, Billings had connections with the northern counties of England, particularly with County Durham and Carlisle, owing to his early work as an architectural illustrator and publisher. He was responsible for the *Architectural Illustrations, History and Description of Carlisle Cathedral*, doing for this building what his former master, John Britton, had done for other English cathedrals.

Billings had known Nicholson, either through the Carlisle connection or the world of architectural publishing, which no doubt explains why he rather than Nicholson’s grandson-in-law was asked to design the Carlisle monument. In his letter to the *Building Chronicle*, he wrote how,

"after a long life spent in the vigorous exercise of his abilities, Peter died in Carlisle in 1844 in his eightieth year, without leaving sufficient to place even a **grave-stone** over his remains. This **great age** at once speaks of his moderation of life, and those who knew him as I did, will remember well the cheerful single-hearted old man, ever ready to impart his knowledge, but never sufficiently alive to his own interest. Although ten years have elapsed since his death, no memorial marks the grave of one of the noblest men in the Architectural annals of Britain. Yet he has not been forgotten or entirely **neglected**, and it is to urge on the practical men of Scotland to take their part in perpetuating one of their own countrymen that this appeal is made..."

What Billings also had in common with Nicholson was a **sophisticated interest** in geometry. In 1840 he published *An Attempt to Define the Geometric Proportions of Gothic Architecture, as illustrated by the Cathedrals of Carlisle and Worcester*. He followed this in 1849 with his book *The Infinity of Geometrical Design Exemplified*, illustrated with beautiful, precise plates of Gothic tracery formed by circles and arcs of circles, and with *The Power of Form applied to Geometric Tracery* two years later. Thomson may not have had much time for Gothic, but he surely would have sympathised with Billings's search for the "elucidation of principles" in Mediaeval



churches and his interest in absolute laws governing form in architecture. "It is impossible," Billings wrote,

"that any man can really study the ancient buildings of our country without observing that their geometric laws are staring him full in the face."

As the Nicholson Monument, as well as his eccentrically detailed Baronial warehouse of 1854-56 on the corner of Ingram Street and Brunswick Street in Glasgow clearly demonstrate, Billings was able to put his grasp of three-dimensional geometry to extraordinary practical effect.

Carlisle Cemetery is well worth visiting to see Robert Billings's most peculiar and yet apposite tribute to Peter Nicholson. It is also an inspiring and well-cared for cemetery – unlike, alas, most

Victorian cemeteries in Britain. Although all the horizontal slabs, kerbs and railings over and around graves have been removed to make the cemetery easier to maintain and more like a landscaped park, the **gravestones themselves** have been **retained**, so **preserving** the historical significance of the place as well as its visual and architectural interest. Indeed, Carlisle Cemetery has become an inspiring model of how other 19th century graveyards might be more sensibly looked after. Furthermore, since 1995 it has become a pioneering woodland burial ground – **apparently** the first in Europe – for **while** old gravestones have been respected, new burials take place without monuments in open ground enhanced by the new planting of oak trees. It is a beautiful place.

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George and the older boys travelled daily to town either on foot or in the solitary horse bus from Cathcart, then the only means of conveyance.

In the 1859 P.O. Directory, George was listed as Lecturer in Geography at FC Normal Seminary and living at Cathcart. The area of Crosshill, Mount Florida and Langside, now part of Glasgow, was a country district with only a few villas and a farm on what is now Queen's Park, to which the children were sent for the daily milk.

The problem of finding schooling for four young children, for whom the journey to town was impossible, was what first put into Jane's head the idea of starting a small private elementary school in her own house. Their daughter Isabella (afterwards Mrs James Hinton Robertson) had been a pupil at a once-well-known private academy in the West End of Glasgow, and was well-qualified to take a leading part in this enterprise. She continued attendance, for a time, at the academy, taking lessons in music and French besides aiding as a pupil teacher.

The small school grew in numbers and it soon became evident that there was a favourable opening for the starting of a private academy in this growing suburban district.



David Stow (*above*, painted by Joh G Gilbert) was a wealthy merchant in Glasgow, and one of the founders of the Glasgow Infant School in 1828 and the Normal Seminary in 1837.

A noted educationalist, he propounded his views in a series of books, in particular *The training system*, which was published in many editions and sold throughout the world, and *Granny and Leazy*.

An adherent of the Free Church of Scotland after the Disruption, he remained associated with the Glasgow Free Church Training College as governor and teacher from 1845 until his death in 1864.

George resigned his post at the Normal Seminary about 1860/61, after failing to be appointed as English lecturer, and started up a private academy, building on the small school started by Jane in their home. Thus originated what afterwards became well-known as the 'Langside Training

Academy' (the name taken in recognition of the 'Training System' of David Stow, whose methods and principles it was meant to carry out). Stow, the author of a book on this 'new' system was an intimate-enough friend for George to name one of his sons after him – David Stow Adam, afterwards Professor of Theology at Ormond College, Melbourne.

The start was encouraging, more than fulfilling their expectations, but before a year had elapsed, George was suddenly stricken by paralysis. With partial recovery, he was able to make such arrangements for the school as were immediately necessary and he went with his son, Hector, to Rothesay in hope of complete recovery but George died there in 1862. Jeanie his daughter was born at Cathcart after her father's death.

The burden of providing a livelihood for herself and family of seven, soon to be increased to eight, now devolved entirely upon Jane, who found herself, after repaying £200, the balance of the loan due on the house, left with a capital of some £20. Added to the grief caused by her husband's death, this burden seemed at first heavier than she could bear but she resolved to carry on the school so recently started, contrary to the advice of most of her counsellors, who thought it madness to expect success in the altered circumstances. Events were to prove that she

was right and that the launching of the Academy had been the best provision George could have made for the support and welfare of his family.

Jane had much natural shrewdness and common-sense which, with a growing business capacity, qualified her for being head of such an Institution better than higher literary accomplishment would have done. She was loyally supported by her eldest daughter Isabella and son Alick; he, though only eighteen at the time of his father's death, became not many years later the able and respected head of the Academy.

For a time, however, it was necessary to engage as head teacher an experienced English and Classical master, along with various visiting masters for various subjects. Jane was behind it all, passing many a wakeful night planning the campaign ahead as well as the daily details of running a school, assigning to all their respective duties and meeting parents who brought their children, or visiting them in their homes when enquiries were made.

In the year following George's death, the number of scholars enrolled was larger than before and year by year it increased till accommodation at Campbell's House became insufficient. Eventually in 1864, Alexander Thomson was commissioned to design a new

## The Adam Family

The children of George Diack ADAM and Jane CONSTABLE were:

- Isabella ADAM (1842-?), who married James Hinton ROBERTSON, lawyer in Glasgow. (8 children)
- Alexander (Alick) ADAM (1844-1919), Headmaster of Langside Academy, married Ann HECTOR (No issue).
- William ADAM (1846-?) Artist. Sailed to Ellis Island in 1893 and moved to Boston, then California. Married (1) Ada Rebecca ROBERTSON, (2) Mary ? (No issue).
- George ADAM (1848-1848).
- Georgina ADAM (1850-1930) married James JOLLY, Minister at Chalmers Free Church, Edinburgh. (8 children).
- Hector Maiben ADAM (1852-1930 at Helensburgh, DBN). Free Church Minister Bon Accord, Aberdeen, Montreux, Lausanne and Crathie. Married Mary HAY. (8 children).
- Thomas (Tom) Beat ADAM (1855-1835 at Brechin). Doctor - missionary in China. Married (1) Isabella ROBERTSON (7 children) and (2) Marjorie DUKE.
- David Stow ADAM (1859-1925 in China). Professor of Theology in Melbourne Australia. Married Mary Grace PATERSON, sister of Professor W P PATERSON, sometime Moderator of the Church of Scotland. (6 children).
- Mary Jane (Jeanie) ADAM (1862-?) married Hugh REYBURN, Free Church Minister at Scoonie, Fife. (3 children).

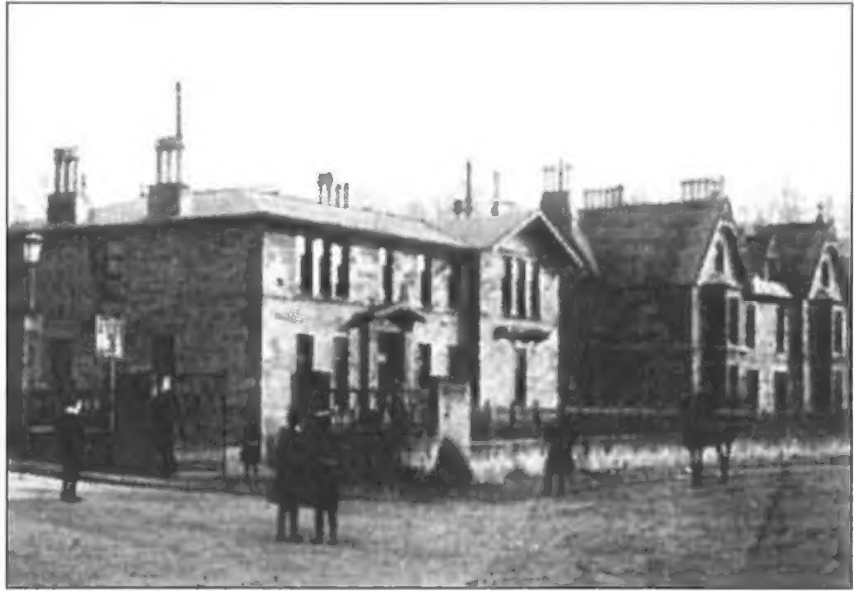
building, more suitable for a school. This design was in his characteristic manner with low-pitched roofs. The School was erected by John McIntyre. According to Hector Maiben Adam, one of George's sons, who wrote a memoir of the period, 'Greek' Thomson's children were being educated at the Academy at the time [The future architect John Thomson certainly studied there].

The Academy continued to prosper with fluctuating fortunes and several

generations of scholars received in it the whole or part of their education. To supplement the fees of day pupils, which were very moderate, a few boarders were taken and treated as members of the family. The chief advantage of this was that it solved the problem of providing a suitable education for the younger children among others of good social position without great expense, and gave a more ample supply of material comforts than would otherwise have been possible.

The education provided in Langside Academy was good, so far as it went, opportunities for sport and recreation not being neglected. Along the side-lines of instruction were Gymnastics – including Fencing and Drill for the boys and Calisthenics and Deportment for the girls. The Teacher of Gymnastics was the ex-army Sergeant Long, who kept a private Gymnasium in Sauchiehall Street near Charing Cross. The Elocution master was something of a character, Harcourt Beatty (Bland), a stage name during his days as a professional actor.

Jane was a shrewd woman and when pondering the question of ways and means, to send her sons to University, she sent Hector to procure a copy of the University *Calendar*. She discovered that a Bursary known as the Adam Bursary “was open by presentation of the Principal to youths entering the Arts Classes, a preference being given to any of the name of the founder”. It was of small amount – about £13 a year, tenable for four years – but would suffice to pay College fees. Without delay she took Hector to interview Principal Caird, whose reception was by no means encouraging. He had already almost committed himself to presenting the Bursary to a personal friend. On looking into the terms of the Trust Deed however he found that he was bound to assign it to any student of the name of Adam who should



*Langside Academy and Edgehill House: in September 1872, Thomson wrote to his brother George that “a set of plans which I made of a double villa for Mrs Adam and her son-in-law Mr J H Robertson” remained on paper because of the high estimated cost. Mrs Adam had Edgehill House built in 1873: its Gothic style resembles Thomson’s work at Cove, and internal Thomsonsque details suggest that Thomson’s unexecuted and lost design was for this site, and that he, or his partner Robert Turnbull, built a cheaper villa in its place.*

come forward. (Hector Maiben Adam noted, “This principle of selection is by no means to be commended, and more recent legislation has since abrogated it”).

Hector had no reason to find fault with it, however, since not only did it supply him with free education at the University for four years, but at the end of this period it was passed on to the next youngest brother and after him to a third brother (The donor of the Adam Bursary was an old minister of Millport, who is memorable in another way as being in the habit of offering in his pulpit prayer the quaint petition, “Bless the greater and the Lesser Cumbraes, and the adjacent islands of great Britain and Ireland”).

By 1891, the school had apparently passed out of the hands of Alick as he is recorded in the 1891 census, visiting his brother, Hector Adam in

Aberdeen, and listed as ‘Unemployed’.

Jane, ‘Old Granny Adam’, as she was known to her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, lived a strenuous and useful life, living until she was nearly 90 years old, in later years, partly in the manses of her sons, but mostly in successive small houses of her own in Rothesay and Kirn. She liked to be independent, but took a lively interest in the growing families of her children. A visit to ‘Old Granny Adam’ by her grandchildren was a privilege, even though it meant good behaviour. She died on 27 Oct 1913 at Juniper Green, age 89, having been living with her daughter Georgina Jolly at Colinton, Edinburgh. She is buried with her daughter Georgina and son-in-law Rev. James Jolly in the Grange Cemetery, Edinburgh.



By DOMINIC D'ANGELO

# Egyptian lamps and paving stones, Part 2

AS WE saw in the last issue of the *Newsletter*, Thomson's six lamp standards for the Egyptian Halls in Union Street attracted fierce criticism almost as soon as they went up.

Various Glasgow Corporation councillors aired their views on their merits and shortcomings: in November 1872, Councillor Miller thought them an "obstruction to the pavement"; Councillor Steel a few days later opined they were

"disgraceful-looking things, and... another cause of tribulation to the poor carters; "

Two letters in defence appeared in the *Glasgow Herald* that month before the subject was dropped, both signed pseudonymously. Thomson himself seems to be totally quiet on the matter: it is unlikely that he would have responded in person to the press using a pseudonym, given his public persona and history of lecture-giving (though, interestingly, no one in the extensive correspondence that appears in the *Herald* ever mentions him by name).

Were there professional reasons why this should be so? Was he extraordinarily busy at the time? His workload does not appear to have been that huge: the Kelvinside Terrace West 'Sixty Steps', the Cowcaddens Cross Building, the small Chalmers Free Church, and two projects for the horse-hirer John E Walker were under way, while



Westbourne Terrace was nearing completion, if not actually finished. This does not seem a huge workload, given the number of assistants he employed. Or perhaps he was increasingly unwell, with the illness that was to claim him three years later at 58? By now, Thomson's children were beginning work or attending school; the older ones were, according to the life of Thomson's nephew John E.H. Thomson, attending Principal Caird's Saturday morning lectures at Glasgow University. There was tragedy ahead: in Partick, Thomson's nephew Dr William Cooper Thomson was witnessing his wife giving birth to her third child, a daughter, before dying a few days later. But Thomson remained silent.

The issue of local government and its approach to street furniture, including lamp standards, continues to be a

point of debate: under current legislation, if any part of a lamp standard can be seen from a public right of way, the local authority's lighting staff appear to have the right to enter private property and remove it if they so wish. That seems to be the reason why, for example, the lamp standards outside Thomson's terrace at Moray Place were destroyed, even though they stood closer to the houses in whose grounds they were located than to the 'main road' (which of course, on the western side is bounded by the railway).

In earlier days, construction and maintenance of pathways and roadways seems to have been a matter of chance: when Ingram Street was first laid out, it was property developers who first constructed pavements (presumably it added to the value of the properties being constructed, encouraged

passers-by, and provided an element of protection to the stonework of buildings).

Once local authorities took charge, street conditions became a political issue (as they remain to this day). Councillor Steel might have opined that Thomson's street furniture was a hazard to carters, but most local authorities were more concerned about the damage to expensive pavements by the carters' iron-rimmed wheels than the other way round: to stop that happening, councils and road-owners had long resorted to the ploy of inserting 'guard-posts' to protect the street line. According to the Greater London Industrial Archaeology Society:

Guard-posts were originally made of wood and placed on the edge of the road to prevent the wheels of heavy coaches and carts from creating ruts and breaking up the footpath. As the surfaces of roads and footpaths improved, it became more expensive to repair them and local authorities and road-owners paid even more attention to guarding them against the ravages of iron-rimmed wheels. Enterprising road-owners started to use captured cannon as guard-posts to protect the footway: the weapon was half-buried in the ground with the cascabel down and the ground line about level with the gun's trunions.

There being a finite number of such unwanted weapons, the authorities resorted to having copies of cannon made from cast-iron. The first copies were styled in the shape of standard

cannon, with a slightly flared muzzle and a domed top to represent a cannon ball. Other posts, slim and tapered with eight sides, were based on early Spanish cannon designs. By the early 1800s and into the Victorian era guard-post shapes took on all the flamboyance the Victorian mind could conceive, some posts adjacent to Tower Bridge reflecting the bridge design.

Thomson's lamp standards for Egyptian Halls survived until, we believe, the 1890s, though two identical castings from the Saracen Foundry appear in London, at the junction of New Cross Road and Queen's Road (*right*), and in Clifton Rise, near New Cross Road. Today, they are listed Grade II, even if the former one started out with a somewhat prosaic purpose, as a ventilation pipe to a former Public Convenience.

The Greenwich Board of Works' underground public convenience was only built in 1897, when this pattern still featured in *McFarlane's Castings* catalogue. The Clifton Rise pipe is not on its original site, and if they are indeed the only examples of Thomson's work in England, what is interesting is that his designs had lasted so long. How content Thomson would have been with the knowledge that his design for lamp standards had been adapted as a ventilation pipe can only be guessed at.



# Events at Holmwood

**V**ISITORS to Holmwood on Doors Open Day will have seen that a number of new exhibits and images connected with Thomson's work are on display, and that the house is well on the way to becoming the centre for Thomson studies. This is very much owing to the imagination and energy of the house manager, Sally White, who has now acquired – on behalf of the National Trust for Scotland – the residue of the 1999 'Unknown Genius' exhibition.

This consists not only of prints of the fine photographs by Phil Sayer but the magnificent timber model of the Queen's Park Church made for 1999 by Telford Fine Furniture. Reassembled, this now dominates (to put it mildly) the Parlour at Holmwood.

This display has been augmented by material from the Mackintosh School of Architecture, Glasgow School of Art, created for the several exhibitions organised by Mark Baines – 1984 (Glasgow and London) and 1995 (Edinburgh) – including both photographs and models. Because of all this, it seemed appropriate that the Society should donate to the NTS the two bronze seals with

## Forthcoming Events

### 3Ls: University of Strathclyde Art Exhibition

Saturday 9 November – Friday 15 November 2002. Daily from 1400 – 2000

Refreshments available.  
Artwork for sale

### Greek St Andrew's Night

Saturday 30 November 2002

A Greek/Scottish night to celebrate St Andrew – patron saint of both countries – and the completion of cleaning the Iliad frieze in the dining room. Call 0141 637 2129 for information and tickets

### Exhibition of Paintings by Evelyn Buchanan

Saturday 30 November – Friday 13 December 2002. Open daily: please call for opening times: 0141 637 2129

Refreshments available.  
Artwork for sale

## WINTERGREEN

### Sale of real Christmas Trees

Wednesday 11 – Sunday 15 December. Daily 0900 – 1600 hours

10% discount for pre-ordering your tree with all proceeds going to conservation work at Holmwood

### Craft Fair

Saturday 14 – Sunday 15 December, 1200 – 1700

Festive afternoon teas.  
Admission 50p Saturday

### The Cairngorm Reindeer

Sunday 15 December 2002

The real Cairngorm reindeer parade through the grounds with a VIP on board!

Doors Open 1200: Be there by 1230 when the parade starts!

Admission all adults £2; children £1 to the event and the Craft Fair

accompanying certificates for membership of the Glasgow Institute of Architects (one for Alexander, one for his brother George) which were so kindly left with us by Thomson's great-granddaughter, Catherine Rentoul, after the 1999 Exhibition.

The chairman has also gifted the ivory-handled architect's

ruling pen owned by Thomson which was generously given him by Mrs Rentoul's sister, Dr Ann Hutchison – on the express condition that the National Trust for Scotland displays at Holmwood the bust of the young Thomson by John Mossman which is currently in store in Edinburgh.

## Next Newsletter

The next *Newsletter* will appear in April 2003.

Two editions of the *Newsletter* now appear annually, in April and September, with separate mailings to notify members of events and meetings.

## The Newsletter

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The Alexander Thomson Society Newsletter is published by The Alexander Thomson Society, 1 Moray Place, Strathbungo, Glasgow G41 2AQ, to whom all enquiries and correspondence should be addressed.

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